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## **Reports from the Congress on Professional Education**

**Mary Reichel and Marion T. Reid**

**Ed note:** More than 100 delegates from national and international associations of library and information studies, educators, and professionals convened in Washington, D.C. for a two-day Congress on Professional Education, April 30-May 1, 1999, sponsored by ALA. The Congress aimed to reach consensus among stakeholder groups on the values and core competencies of the profession and on strategies for action to address common issues and concerns.

The impetus for the Congress arose from changes in name of some programs of graduate education, the seeming lack of attention to core competencies, and the national shortage of professionals to work with young people and diverse and underserved populations. Following are reports from two ACRL members who attended the Congress.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

This report is one of impressions and thoughts, since there is an excellent summary of the Congress done by Ken Haycock, University of British Columbia and chair of the Steering Committee, on the ALA Web site for the Congress (<http://www.ala.org/congress/>). The Web site also contains background reading, ACRL's statement for the Congress, and copies of the talks.

Participation at the Congress left me with a number of questions and concerns about the professional degree and academic librarians.

## **VALUES**

In connection with the speakers and panels, participants spent time in small groups discussing values, philosophy, and strategies for action. It was clear that participants wanted graduates to have carefully tuned abilities in such areas as interpersonal skills, written and oral communication, and a predisposition to continue to learn. There was less emerging agreement on what the curriculum or content of library and information science programs need to have for the new millennium.

To follow up on the work of the Congress, ACRL needs to continue our activities defining and publicizing what academic librarians need at the beginning of their careers in terms of formal preparation.

## **EDUCATIONAL ROLES**

It certainly made me think to have the dichotomy of practitioners/educators referred to in many presentations. (Luckily, a number of speakers acknowledged that we are all educators.) Perhaps this dichotomy has a deeper grounding in the uneasy recognition of the library and information science faculty of the pedagogical and curricular role of academic librarians as well as academic librarians' role of supporting and advancing research.

I found myself very interested in pursuing the relationship of undergraduate majors or minors in information science (e.g., programs at University of Pittsburgh and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and information literacy efforts and curriculum throughout higher education. Academic librarians and library and information science faculty need to explore the connections and gaps in our efforts.

A closely related issue is the lack of willingness of graduate programs to prepare librarians for their teaching role. Although this issue has been an ongoing concern of ACRL for more than 20 years, this area remains deficient in graduate programs, a problem for librarians in all types of libraries, as was articulated at the Congress. ACRL can be proud of its Institute for Information Literacy (IIL) and the leadership role that it represents in preparing librarians for their educational role. At the same time, graduate programs need to accept the importance of learning to teach and incorporate it fully into the curriculum.

## **ACCREDITATION**

Sue Martin, of Georgetown University, proposed in her presentation that ALA seriously study its accreditation process and look at the possibility of establishing with other professional organizations a separate accrediting body.

This proposal has much merit (even if the outcome of the process was not a separate body), and ACRL may want to use its influence to encourage ALA to put such a study high on its agenda. For me, Congress clarified the need to understand both the ALA and NCATE accrediting value and process. ACRL's need to articulate programs and activities with librarians in the K-12 sector particularly demands an understanding of the role of NCATE accreditation, since many school librarians follow that path.

## **CONCLUSION**

I learned new ideas and areas of study from many delegates to the Congress, but the delegates I learned the most from were the current students, those doing programs solely through distance learning and those in campus settings. While my overall reaction to the Congress was to have real concerns about the adequacy of the masters degree as the preparation for academic librarians, my interaction with students gave me great hope for future generations of librarians.--Mary Reichel

## **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR A LIBRARY SCHOOL LATELY?**

We library practitioners are frequently at odds with library educators. We take issue with the way things are taught now or if we're on a campus that also has a library school, we criticize aspects of how it's run. We're concerned that those graduating now won't have the same values instilled in us during our library education.

People are our most important resource. Education of our future librarians is the key to the security of our future libraries, no matter what their iteration. The best thing you as a practitioner can do is quit quibbling and contribute to the education of our future librarians. "I can't do that," you say. "I'm not anywhere near a library school. And besides, they're all changing their names!" Well, listen up. There are things you can do.

## **DROP THE NAME THING**

A lot has been in the literature lately about "The L Word." Should library schools retain the word "library" as part of their names or not? I was privileged to participate in discussions at the ALA's Congress on Professional Education. There, a thread throughout the sessions was: quit griping about what a school or program is called. Barbara Spiegelman, manager of Technical Information Services at the Westinghouse Company, put it most succinctly: "We mention 'The L Word' as if we're ashamed of the word 'library.' The more we do this, the more others will feel the same. We're modeling behavior we don't want to see out there." So, stop "The L Word" arguments

## **CONVERSE WITH EDUCATORS**

- \* Find out what their challenges are; why some of their new faculty have Ph.D.'s in fields other than librarianship; why they believe it appropriate to change their program's name. Genuinely pose your questions in a positive light, without putting them on the defensive.

- \* Think about their situations. They are faced with significant dynamic tensions. Just like academic librarians, they must marshal finite resources while providing opportunity for creative new directions. Just like academic librarians, they must hire people with ongoing interest in quality teaching, quality research, and quality service. However, they must also provide high-quality graduates who perform well for pragmatic employers. And, unlike academic librarians, they serve two masters: practitioners and their institutions. Certainly, they want to know what we think, but the budget they receive is based on how well their administrative superiors judge they are meeting the institution's mission. They may be, for example, walking a tightrope stretched between the needs of the employers in their region and the mission of their institution to gain international stature.

## **GIVE**

- \* Go to a library school reunion at ALA. Talk not only with your fellow classmates and others you know graduated from your institution, but also with current faculty and find out what they're up to and how you might help.

- \* Volunteer to help a library school program. Even if you're not in the geographical locale of a library school, contact one and find out what you can do at a distance. Can you participate in an electronic list? Answer questions of a student for a particular assignment relevant to your expertise? Be paired as a mentor with a student?

\* Offer an internship in the field. Library education is about both theory and practice. Volunteer to provide a practical experience that allows a library school student to grapple with a real-life academic library problem and come up with a solution. Give the student both the latitude to do something meaningful and the appropriate guidance and tools which will allow for success. Be honest in your evaluation of their work.

\* Teach. Volunteer as a guest lecturer for a library school class. Become an adjunct and teach an entire course. Students better understand multiple perspectives when they have both full-time library educators and practitioners as their professors.

\* Participate in professional committees that contribute to library education. For example, become involved in pertinent groups within ACRL. These include the Education and Professional Development Committee of the Rare Books & Manuscripts Section, the Education for Library Instruction Committee of the Instruction Section, the Distance Learning Section, or the continuing education committees in the College Libraries Section, the Instruction Section, the Science & Technology Section, and the Slavic and Eastern European Section. Seek appointment to ALA standing Council committees, which directly address education issues: the Education Committee and the Accreditation Committee. Volunteer for the site visitor pool of the latter body by contacting Ann O'Neil, director of ALA's Office for Accreditation.

\* Give money. During the Congress, I heard the story of a library educator who gave back to his library school one-tenth of what he earned each year. Budgeting, after all, is what you make it. I'm not asking you to tithe; I'm asking you to consider contributing more than in the past the next time you get one of those solicitation letters or phone calls from your library school.

## **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR A LIBRARY SCHOOL LATELY?**

Now, dear colleague, if you've read this far, I offer you a challenge: Vow that by this time next year, you, as an academic librarian, will be doing more than you are now for library education. After all, contributing to the education of new librarians is one of the most important things you can do!--Marion T. Reid